

Testimony



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To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, Insurance, Campaign Finance Reform, and Housing
From: Tony Gibart, Policy Coordinator, 608-255-0539 ext 310, tonyg@wcadv.org
Re: Informational Testimony on Senate Bill 613

Chairperson Taylor and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on Senate Bill 613—the Uniform Collateral Consequences of Conviction Act. My name is Tony Gibart, and I represent the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). WCADV is the statewide membership organization that represents domestic violence service providers and survivors. WCADV thanks the lead sponsors, Senator Taylor and Representative Parisi, for introducing this legislation and expressing a willingness to work with us to address some concerns.

As a victim advocacy organization, WCADV strongly believes that society should hold perpetrators accountable for the pain and harm they have caused. However, our organization also believes that once they have served their debt to society, convicted criminals should have an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves, be civically engaged and lead productive lives.

Therefore, WCADV supports the intent behind Senate Bill 613. The law will ensure that criminal defendants are better aware of the consequences of convictions. The bill will also provide judges with the opportunity to relieve individuals of long-term, indirect sanctions that hinder their ability to earn income or find housing. Providing convicted individuals paths to productive and successful lives is especially important in communities that have been devastated by the disproportionate impact of crime. Giving rehabilitated individuals better opportunities to succeed creates more stable and healthier communities. Ultimately, victims of domestic abuse fair better and violence is reduced when communities are strong.

While we generally support the thrust of Senate Bill 613, WCADV has a few concerns relating to current provisions in law that protect victims from harm. These are not meant to punish offenders, but are intended to improve victim and community safety. One example is a presumption that currently applies in family law cases when a parent has engaged in serious acts of domestic violence. Under current law, these offenders are presumed to be unfit for joint or sole legal custody unless they have undergone treatment and are not abusing drugs or alcohol. WCADV would like to ensure that current family laws will be unaffected by the new procedures created under the bill. In addition, current federal and state laws prohibit individuals with some criminal convictions from possessing firearms. These laws are critical protections that reflect the grave danger to victims when violent criminals and abusers have access to guns. WCADV asks that the sponsors and committee members carefully consider the effect SB 613 would have on these safety protections.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. WCADV is appreciative of the sponsors' and the committee's work this session to make Wisconsin's laws more sensitive to the needs of victims. We look forward to continuing to work together on Senate Bill 613.